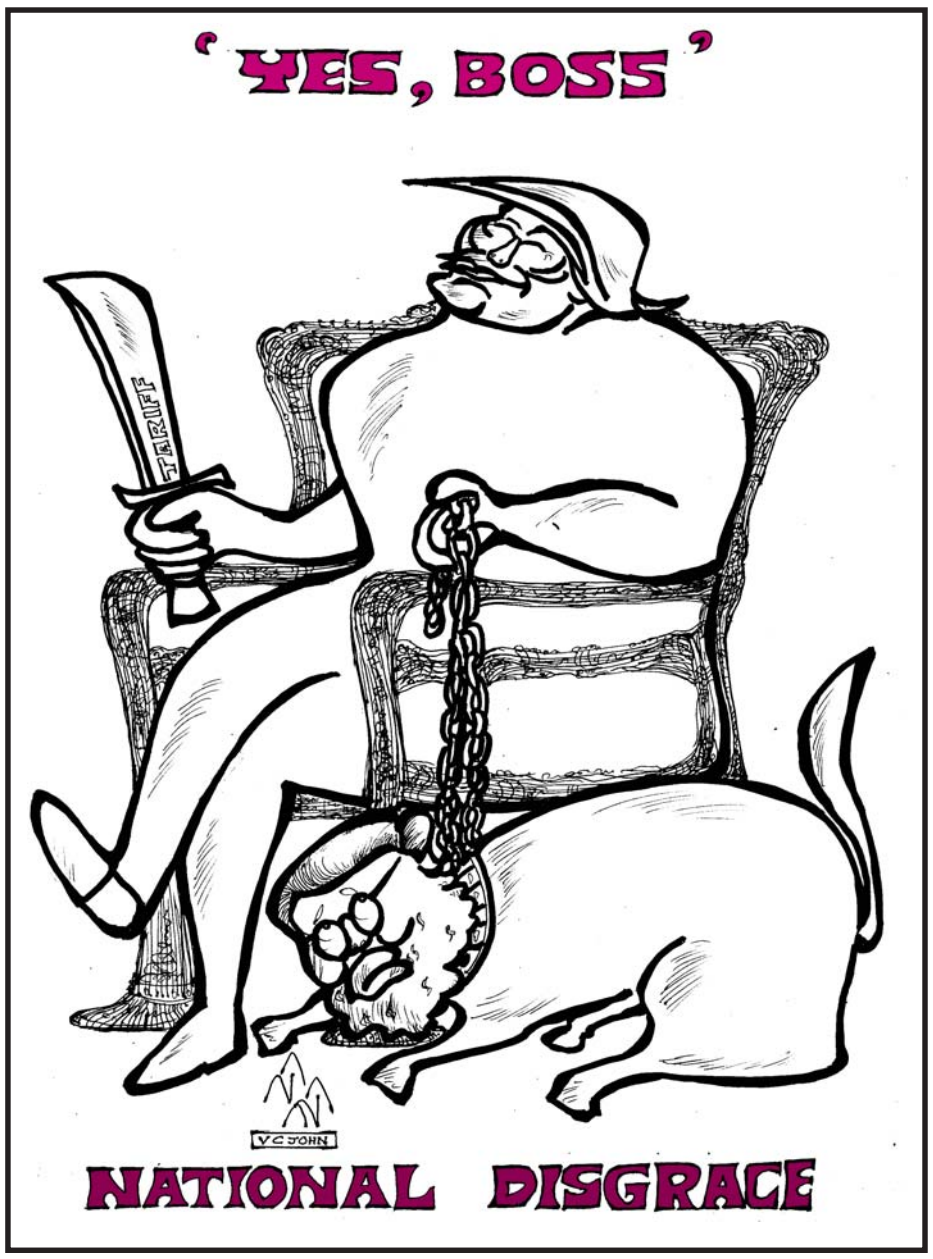
***Registered RNI No.* 45550/88**
Published on 10th and 25th every month
Posted at Mumbai Patrika Channel Sorting Office, Mumbai - 400 001,
on 10th & 25th every month.

MCN/209/2024-2026
WPP Licence No. **MR/Tech/WPP-353/North/2024-26**
Licence to post without prepayment

People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

■ VOLUME 39 ISSUE 04 ■ MUMBAI ■ FEBRUARY 25 - MARCH 09, 2026 ■ ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION **Rs. 100/-**



WCC mourns loss of US civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson

Rev. Jesse Jackson Passed Away on 17 February

World Council of Churches general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay commended Jackson's prophetic role, passionate advocacy, and drive for justice.

Rev. Jesse Jackson

"Rev. Jesse Jackson was a great gift to all those who believed and acted for justice, equality, and love," said Pillay. "As he advocated for freedom and democracy around the world, he served humanity in a way that showed his belief that we are all children of God. We give thanks for his life and contributions to make his country and the world a better place striving for justice, equality and liberation."

"Rev. Jesse Jackson was not only an iconic civil rights leader of our time, serving with global leaders like the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, he was a pastor and priest to, and with the people," said Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith, from the National Baptist Convention USA, and WCC president from North America.

– WCC News

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THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

"Stand Against Indifference"

Writing to church leaders on Ash Wednesday, Lutheran World Federation General Secretary Anne Burghardt, urges Lutheran churches worldwide not to be indifferent when human dignity is ignored, warning against narratives that rank people by status, ethnicity, or gender.

"More urgent than ever to preach the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ"

At a moment when some political leaders are openly suggesting that groups of people possess less dignity than others — on the basis of status, ethnicity or gender — LWF General Secretary Burghardt reminds churches across the world of "our vocation to bear witness – gently yet firmly – to the God-given dignity of every human being." History has shown where the dominant thinking leads: to the de-humanization of entire groups, to immense suffering, and even to the loss of countless lives. **What many long for, she writes, is peace "in the world and in our churches, in families and in the workplace," a peace that endures against the powers that sow fear and division.**

Lent, Burghardt states, is the season to ask not only what we should refrain from, but what requires deeper attention in our relationships, our structures, our own communities. Jesus crossed the dividing lines of his time with compassion and courage. Following him means honoring one another's gifts and enabling everyone to live into their calling.

The LWF General Secretary also speaks on the erosion of truth and the international order. When respect for law collapses, power becomes the only measure of right. **In the Beatitudes, those who long for righteousness are twice called blessed, she writes.** And in an era of plagued false witness and misinformation, Luther's explanation of the eighth commandment feels urgent: **Christians are called to come to their neighbor's defense, speak well of them,**

Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt

Lent is "an invitation to draw closer to Christ through intentional spiritual practices, while at the same time responding to Christ's love through compassionate action for others."

and interpret their actions in the best possible light.

Through all of this runs an essential question posed to churches and Christians during Lent: what does it mean to walk toward the cross in this particular moment? Burghardt's advice is to trust that even small steps may, like the mustard seed, grow and change the world — that transformative peace is possible as reconciliation lived in the interplay of love, justice and truth.

"We are not left alone," she writes. "Jesus Christ has promised to be with us to the end of the age, grounding our hope and strengthening our resilience," adding that "It is more urgent than ever to preach the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ in opposition to misleading theologies built on fear, meritocracy and prosperity."

"I pray that this Lenten season may be a time of prayer, discernment, and renewal of the mind, collectively and individually," Burghardt writes in conclusion.

– LWF News

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The world trapped in the web of Epstein

The contents of Epstein files released by the Department of Justice of the US bring shocking revelations about the toxic relationship between dirty money, sex and centres of power across the world. Epstein, a U S billionaire financier, has been running the business of supplying women between the ages of 12 and 35 to the top 'elites' across the world in his own 75-acre St. James island under special security arrangements. This has been a business that combines money, women and power. He brought a large number of girls in this luxury island and used them as sex slaves.

After several years of investigation, he was arrested in 2015 and put into jail as a convict. In August 2019 he died in jail owing to suspected suicide. It is by refusing the resistance from centres of power for a long period, the Department of Justice released the first batch of Epstein files on 19 December 2025. Out of over 6 million pages, only nearly 3 million pages are released so far. It consists of 2000 videos and 180,000 images of sex trafficking and thousands of emails and financial documents that shed light on Epstein's dirty connection with various high-profile individuals. As per reports, the list includes 300 political leaders, the Presidents and Prime Ministers of prominent countries, billionaires and also political, economic, scientific, educational, journalistic and sporting elites of the West.

These files reveal the forces, relationships and nature of the new global architecture, and the role of money and sex in shaping and controlling the mind-set and decisions of the elites of every area of life. This is not a mere sex scandal. Alexander Dugin says that this shows the real collapse of the Western World – collapse in terms of ideology, philosophy, morality and everything else. "The West represented such a system of diabolical civilisation, at the centre of which stand Satanic cannibalistic sects that eat children, traffic women, carry out provocations around the world, manipulates financial markets and political process" he adds.

In Europe mass-resignations and criminal cases have started. One former Prime Minister of Norway is under arrest. It is reported that Mr. Trump, from morning till night, is calling European leaders with demands and threats that they should not open criminal cases based on these files.

People in the West are asking: whom can we turn to? If you dislike Democrats you have to vote for Republicans and vice versa. Whom should we vote for? There are Satanists everywhere. The present politics and ideologies in the West are the products of dark secret organisations that appear in Epstein's files. People say that this is a total collapse of the West! "Whoever we vote for, we will still be voting for Satan"! Who will carry out the purge to cleanse oneself of this elite world men - to cleanse oneself of the elites as such is a big question! Any hint of the West, any hint of contemporary liberal, economic, capitalistic culture, civilisation – all of that must be shut down immediately. Because, all the roads do not lead to Rome; but to Epstein's island!

Thought for the Fortnight

"I think perfect objectivity is an unrealistic goal; fairness, however, is not".

– Michael Pollan

A Biblical And Theological Search

God, Word, World and Power

M. J. Joseph

**The Lord's prayer is, indeed, a call to re-read the nature of God as He is!
When we pray, "Our Father in heaven",
none of us should have the divine mandate to exclude anyone
or even any creature in the universe from the surveillance of the grace of God.
We need to affirm that
"the compassion of human beings is for their neighbors,
but the compassion of the Lord is for very living things"**

Introduction

The subject "One Word, Many Versions: a Re-reading of the Holy Books, speaks of the divine revelation in diverse ways and its bearing on "all that breathe" (Ps.150.6). An initiative to re-read the Holy Books is meant to evolve new paradigms for a unitive vision of the God-self. The Divine Word which contains in the Religious Scriptures of the world, illumines the human minds for a response, aiming at the transformation of God's one world.

The theme of the 9th assembly of the WCC, "God of Grace-transform the World", is a theo - centric prayer which is inclusive in its nature. In an inter-religious context, it paves the way for a celebration of diversity in God's one world. The God of Creation has revealed His glory at different times in His own way by sharing His power and glory for a right attitude to God and other living beings.

The Word - divine power - assumes different shades

In Jn.1:1-5, there is an exposition of the Word before the Incarnation. The power of God understood as Logos in Greek-thought has its equivalents in other religious traditions. The identity of the Word in John's gospel is described in four spheres:- pre-existent outside time (vs.1-2); agent of creation within time (v.3); life and source of life (v.4) and the invisible principle conquering darkness or the forces of evil (v.5). It should be remembered that the prologue speaks simply of the Word and not *of the words of God/or its versions*. God is "fullness of being" and "the unfathomable wisdom" (cf. Rom.11.33). There is a complimentary reading for John's concept of Logos in Heb.1.1-4,: "When in former times

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God spoke to our forefathers, he spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets. But in this the final age, he has spoken to us in the Son whom he has made heir to the whole universe, and through whom he created all orders of existence". The text raises hermeneutical questions which are existential in nature. Could we make circumference to God's fragmentary revelation and confine it to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible? **Is it not legitimate for us "to enlarge the place of our tent and to lengthen our chords and strengthen our stakes" so as to include the sages of old outside the Hebrew Bible? Do we have the legitimacy to dismiss the rishis of India who were too the harbingers of God's word of grace. The Upanishidic prayer "*Asato ma satgamaya*" is really the longing of the human heart for a divine answer. The time is quite ripe in the 21st century for the Church to welcome a paradigm shift in mission in terms of a sincere move *from consolidation to comprehension.***

To discover, to appreciate, and to promote rich diversity based on the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom is not a gospel at variance but a fresh discovery of the work of the Spirit for unraveling the glory of God revealed in Christ. **The knowledge of unity in diversity is a creative possibility for the future of humankind. *God's gift of one humanity in Christ has many versions and shades*. The angelic song. "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors" (Lk.2:14), is an inclusive blessing for all humanity. As peace on Earth is a divine gift for all, it is not right to set limits to God's manifold ways of dealing with humanity (cf. 1Cor. 1:30).**

God's inclusive nature - scope for many versions!

The Lord's prayer is, indeed, a call to re-read the nature of God as He is! When we pray, "Our Father in heaven", none of us should have the divine mandate to exclude anyone or even any creature in the universe from the surveillance of the grace of God. We need to affirm that "the compassion of human beings is for their neighbors, but the compassion of the Lord is for very living things" (Book of Sirach 18.13) This means that the attitude of God too has different stances. God is incomprehensible, all powerful (omnipotent), all-wise (omniscient), all-good (benevolent), and everywhere present (omnipresent). From the time of the ancient Greeks, philosophers have tried to prove the existence of God by reasons alone (not by divine revelation). **In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, God is believed to**

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A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS
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Environmental Racism and the Cry for Water

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

The Bible ends with a promise:
a river of the water of life, flowing freely for the healing of the nations.
That river does not flow into private tanks but rather through the city's streets, bringing life to all.
Our response, therefore, cannot stop at sympathy.
We are called not only to pray, but to stand with the thirsty.
Not only to preach, but to speak truth to power.
Not only to feel compassion, but to demand justice.

During my visit to Canada in 2025, I was deeply impressed by the country's infrastructure, orderly urban planning, and breathtaking landscapes. Roads were smooth, cities were well organised, and public services appeared efficient and responsive. Development seemed carefully balanced with environmental concern. At first glance, Canada appeared to be a model nation — one, many countries might aspire to emulate.

Yet, as I read more closely, engaged in conversations, and examined both historical and contemporary realities, a disturbing contradiction slowly emerged beneath this polished surface.

The land that now forms modern Canada, originally belonged to Indigenous peoples — First Nations, Inuit, and Métis — long before European settlers arrived during colonial expansion. What followed was not merely migration or settlement; it was dispossession. **Indigenous peoples were pushed off their ancestral lands, confined to restricted territories, and compelled to abandon traditional ways of life.** Colonial policies systematically dismantled Indigenous governance, culture, and spiritual relationships with the land.

The consequences of those decisions are not confined to history books. They are painfully visible even today — especially in what many now describe as environmental racism.

Kashechewan First Nation

Kashechewan First Nation is a remote Indigenous community in northern Ontario, located near James Bay, and along the Albany River. The region is low-lying and marshy. Every spring, as ice melts and river levels rise, flooding becomes almost inevitable.

Here, floods do more than damage houses. They contaminate drinking water, disrupt sewage systems, and paralyse basic infrastructure. Because the community is accessible primarily by air, emergency response is slow, costly, and highly disruptive. Families are repeatedly evacuated to distant cities, housed temporarily in hotels, and then sent back—only to face the same danger again the following year.

This cycle is not accidental. Many Indigenous communities were historically settled in geographically vulnerable locations, far from urban centres and long-term public investment. In Kashechewan, unsafe drinking-water advisories and flood threats have persisted for decades. Though governments have repeatedly promised relocation to safer ground, progress has been painfully slow.**This is not merely a logistical or administrative failure. It is a question of human dignity.**

Who Are the First Nations?

In Canada, Indigenous Peoples include three broad groups: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. First Nations are not a single community. They consist of many nations, languages, cultures, and governance systems that existed long before colonial borders were drawn.

While treaties and legal frameworks formally recognise certain rights, lived reality tells a different story. Many First Nations communities continue to face serious inequalities in housing, healthcare, education, road connectivity, employment opportunities, and access to safe drinking water.

Kashechewan's crisis, therefore, is not only environmental—it is structural. Geography may expose vulnerability, but policy determines whether vulnerability becomes suffering.

Environmental Racism: When Neglect Becomes a Pattern

Environmental racism occurs when racialised or marginalised communities bear a disproportionate share of environmental harm while receiving delayed or inadequate protection. It is rarely loud or openly hostile. More often, it operates quietly—through neglect, underinvestment, and unequal urgency.

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If a wealthy urban neighbourhood in Canada had unsafe drinking water for decades, it would provoke national outrage and immediate intervention. When similar conditions persist in Indigenous communities, they are often explained away as unfortunate "complexities." That difference reveals a painful truth: some lives are treated as less urgent than others.

A Global Pattern of Unequal Burden

Environmental racism is not unique to Canada. Similar patterns appear across the world: African-American communities living near toxic industries in the United States; Aboriginal lands affected by mining in Australia; Indigenous communities displaced by deforestation in Brazil; Adivasi and Dalit communities bearing industrial pollution in India; and oil-polluted communities in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

The names change. The geography changes. The pattern does not.

To be fair, Canada today has taken several positive steps. There has been official acknowledgement of the harm caused by residential schools, public apologies, compensation processes, increased support for Indigenous education and language revival, and some progress in self-governance and land-claim agreements. Public awareness has grown, and the language of reconciliation has entered national discourse.

Yet many Indigenous communities continue to experience unequal environmental protection. That is why the term environmental racism remains relevant—because justice delayed is still justice denied.

Water, Faith, and the Cry for Justice

In the Bible, water is never a small matter. Water is life. Water is dignity. Water is God's gift to all creation. Yet even today, communities across the world live without safe water—not because God has denied them, but because human systems have failed them.

The crisis of Kashechewan First Nation is one such painful testimony. For decades, unsafe water and recurring floods have shaped daily life. When the river rises, sewage mixes with drinking water. Families are uprooted again and again. This is not merely a natural disaster. It is repeated injustice.

The story echoes the Israelites in the wilderness. In Exodus 17, the people cry out, "Why did you bring us out… to make us die of thirst?" Their thirst was not only physical—it was a cry of fear, abandonment, and broken hope. God responded by giving water from the rock, affirming that God hears the cry of the thirsty.

Kashechewan forces us to ask a deeper question: *If God hears the cry of the thirsty, why do governments and societies remain slow to act?* When people are forced to leave their homeland again and again, their suffering is not only about water. It is about identity, belonging, and dignity. Leaving their roots in the soil, only their bodies travel in search of water — this is a modern lament, echoing the pain of exile.

The prophet Amos declares, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." **Justice, in the biblical vision, is not a speech or a promise. It is a river—life-giving, unstoppable, and nourishing.** Where justice is blocked, water becomes polluted. Where justice is delayed, life becomes fragile.

Jesus, too, spoke of water as dignity-restoring grace. When he offered living water to a marginalised Samaritan woman, he affirmed that God's gifts are not reserved for the privileged. God's water flows toward the excluded, the forgotten, and the displaced.

A Call Beyond Sympathy

Kashechewan reveals environmental racism not only as a social failure, but as a moral and spiritual crisis. It is a sin against people — and against God's vision of creation, where every community is meant to live in safety and respect.

The Bible ends with a promise: a river of the water of life, flowing freely for the healing of the nations. That river does not flow into private tanks but rather through the city's streets, bringing life to all.

Our response, therefore, cannot stop at sympathy.

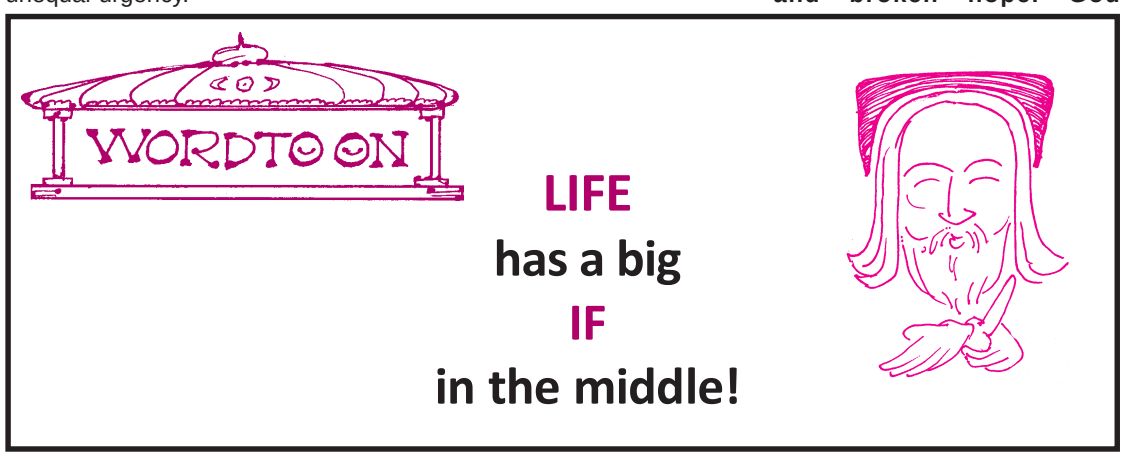
We are called not only to pray, but to stand with the thirsty.

Not only to preach, but to speak truth to power.

Not only to feel compassion, but to demand justice.

When one community is forced to flee in search of water, the Church — and society — cannot remain silent. Water is not a privilege. Water is sacred. Water is life.

May we find the courage to turn faith into action, compassion into advocacy, and prayer into public witness — until every Kashechewan, everywhere in the world, can drink safely and live with dignity. ●



BOOK REVIEW

Book Review

PUBLIC RELIGIONS IN A POST SECULAR ERA

Editor: Y. T. Vinayaraj

Book Review by Samuel Abraham

What Comes After Secularism?

Bringing together essays by leading Indian scholars, this book explores how religion continues to shape public ethics, political debate, and democratic practice. It critically rethinks Indian secularism and its wider implications, offering new ways of thinking about religion, justice, and democracy in the world we live in.

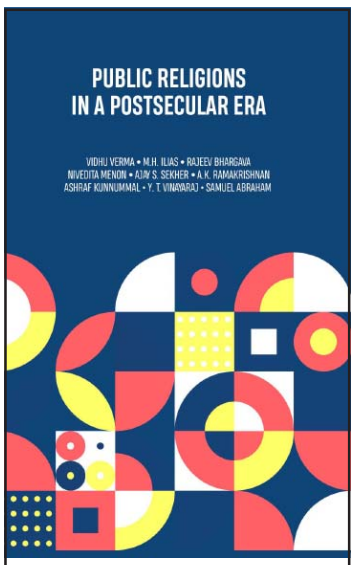
Religion has and continues to shape public life, politics, and identity globally. When negotiations between the Lech Walêsa–led Solidarity movement and the Communist government began in Poland in 1989, three observers from the church were present at the Round Table Talks. Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia framed the struggle against totalitarianism during the Velvet Revolution (1989) as a moral and spiritual awakening rather than a political revolt. Whatever its political underpinnings, religion was interwoven with the language of protest during the Tunisian Revolution (2010–11) and the Arab Spring. The watershed moment came on September 11, 2001, when the world's fault lines were violently exposed.

Rev. Dr. Y. T. Vinayaraj is the Director of The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), Bangalore

José Casanova, sociologist of religion and the author of *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), argued that this marked the re-emergence of religion in public life. His idea of the deprivatization of religion—that faith continues to influence the public sphere rather than retreat into private life—would inform later debates on postsecularism.

The term "postsecularism" was introduced into the philosophical lexicon by Jürgen Habermas, a leading figure of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Religion, he argued, continued to shape moral and political life, and rather than clashing, religious and secular perspectives must engage one another with mutual respect.

The essays in this volume engage with this scholarly idea of postsecularism. Written by eminent Indian academics—Rajeev Bhargava, A. K. Ramakrishnan, Nivedita Menon, VidhuVerma, M. H. Ilias, Ajay S. Sekher, Ashraf Kunnummal, and


PUBLIC RELIGIONS
IN A POSTSECULAR ERA
VIDHU VERMA • M.H. ILIAS • RAJEEV BHARGAVA
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PUBLIC RELIGIONS IN A POST SECULAR ERA
Edited by Rev. Dr. Y. T. Vinayaraj,
Published by CISRS & ISPCK,
200 pages, Price: Rs. 450/-

Y. T. Vinayaraj—**these essays frame postsecularism not as a rejection of modernity but as a re-examination of its foundations.** Scholars debate whether the "post" in the term means "after," as in "religion after secularism." The consensus is that the postsecular era is not a return to a pre-secular past but a **journey of renewal.**

The book situates this debate firmly in the Indian context. Indian secularism, unlike its Western counterpart, was conceived as equal respect for all religions rather than strict separation between religion and state.

Against this background, Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar emerge as thinkers far ahead of their time. Gandhi's insistence that religion cannot be separated from politics, and Ambedkar's understanding of *dhamma* as a moral force meant to "reconstruct the world," challenge both the dogmatism of organized religion and the moral emptiness of a purely secular rationality.

Essays in this volume explore Gandhi's ideas of *sarva dharma sambhava*, *satyagraha*, and his critique of material progress as articulating a distinctive vision of public religion—one oriented toward moral transformation rather than state power. At the same time, they highlight Ambedkar's turn to Buddhism as a radical theological-political act that rejects both Brahminical hierarchy and Western liberal secularism. According to Y. T. Vinayaraj, the editor of this volume, by embracing Buddhism Ambedkar transformed religion into a tool of liberation and ethical resistance, reclaiming its public and political dimension.

Ambedkar's Navayana Buddhism exemplifies a postsecular religious imagination that unites ethical rationality with social transformation. It proposes a public religion of equality, grounded in human dignity and justice. This vision becomes a model of what Vinayaraj calls radical political theology—one that moves beyond traditional liberation theologies tied to metaphysical notions of divine sovereignty.

Radical postsecular theology envisions a de-sovereignized, material, and planetary spirituality grounded in the politics of the excluded — the "crucified" and the "earth." It affirms the agency of matter, ecology, and embodied communities, and calls for a political theology of the earth that resists neoliberal domination, reshaping theology as a process of re-worlding t he present rather than worrying about an "other world."

This book challenges the certainty of secular reason by asking how justice, dignity, and democracy can be pursued in the world we live in. ●

Mr. Samuel Abraham is a former Associate Editor of Frontline

A Biblical And Theological Search

God, Word, World and Power

>>> Contd. from Page 2 Col. 4

have revealed himself in history through the life and response of the people of Israel, and in the Christian tradition, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. The basic question before us is to tackle *the one and the many* in God's economy of Salvation. The Canon of the Holy Bible takes into account the revelatory nature of God who is transcendent and all powerful, and related to the cosmos as its creator. Therefore, the first task is to re-read the gift of plurality in God's order of creation. **"The immeasurable riches of God's grace towards all human beings in Jesus Christ" (Eph.2.7) help us to affirm both the rational and the revelatory character of divine wisdom.**

The words of life embedded in the Bible had a new version as radical obedience in the life of Gandhiji. The Kingdom reality in the Gospel has a universal appeal for the transformation of the world.

For a long time, the harbingers of God's word were quite busy in keeping the Word as if it was their private property and speak occasionally of the impartiality of God in dealing with people. "The letter kills and the fragrance of the letter gives life" (Mahatma Gandhi). The Sermon on the Mount, the hymn of love in 1Cor.13 by St. Paul, the book of Daniel and of Job had influenced Gandhiji tremendously. The words of life embedded in the Bible had a new version as radical obedience in the life of Gandhiji. The Kingdom reality in the Gospel has a universal appeal for the transformation of the world. **The ethical norms of Thirukural and the Sermon on the Mount have their origin in two cultural contexts. But they have a universal appeal and they urge us to search for *satyam* (truth), sivam(order) and sundaram (beauty) in the celebration of life. The nature poets of different countries testify this. The ultimate goal of the Holy Books is to create God awareness as communitarian consciousness in the World.** ●

To be continued

In the next issue

- **In search of spirituality of the Divine Word**
- **The Power of the One and the Many**

Lenten Meditations

The Prophetic Economy of the Broken Jar: A Story of Fragrance, Freedom, and the Fracture of Empire

Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda

Mark 14:3–9,
Matthew 26:6–13
John 12:1–8

The evening carried a strange stillness, like the breath held before a storm. The city was swollen with pilgrims and soldiers; coins clinked in temple courtyards, and whispers of revolt threaded through the streets. Power was nervous; Rome watched; religion calculated. And in a borrowed home in Bethany - on the far side of the empire's shadow - I entered the room.

I carried in my hands a small jar, alabaster smooth and cool, sealed around a perfume so costly that people measured its worth in years of labour. But to me it was more than value - it was memory, survival, hope distilled. I had kept it for burial, for mourning, for the day I might need to anoint a wound that would not heal. Now it was time.

1. Entering the Room: The Courage of the Margins

Men filled the room - disciples, priests' sympathizers, local leaders - voices trading in theology and strategy. No one looked up when I entered. Women like me learned early on to move quietly, to serve unseen, to listen from the edges. But that night, silence fell as I crossed the threshold. Their eyes said what their tongues did not: *She doesn't belong here.*

Yet the margins know the pulse of the world more keenly than those at its centre. We live close to the pain, where God still speaks. I saw what they did not: that the Teacher's laughter was thinner that night, that His eyes carried the far look of someone walking toward a cross no one else could yet see. He had spoken of betrayal, of death, of a cup soon to be poured. The others argued politics; I heard lament.

2. Breaking the Jar: The Act That Shattered the Silence

Without asking permission, I stepped forward. I held the jar above His head - and broke it. The sound cracked through the room like thunder. Fragrance rushed out - sweet, sharp, unstoppable - filling the air, seeping into every breath, every garment, every corner of that stifled space.

The perfume ran down His hair and hands, dripping to the floor. It mingled with dust and tears. The scent was overwhelming - beautiful, extravagant, unbearable. It was the smell of both life and death, of resistance and surrender. In that act, I crossed every line that the empire and patriarchy had drawn.

As the perfume soaked into His skin,
I imagined it seeping into the world's wounds - the wounds of colonized lands,
of violated bodies, of plundered earth. That scent would cling to Him when soldiers mocked Him,
when nails tore flesh, when the tomb closed. The fragrance of love would mingle with the stench of death, and something divine would awaken.
In His kin-dom, love replaces law as the measure of holiness,
and mercy is the new currency of worth.

They called it waste. I called it worship.

They saw impropriety. I saw prophecy.

They counted the cost. I measured the love.

3. The Pushback: The Language of Power

Immediately, the rebuke came. "Why this waste? This perfume could have been sold, and the money given to the poor."

Their words stung; not because they cared for the poor, but because they could not bear generosity that refused their control. They spoke the language of efficiency - the logic of the empire, where even compassion is budgeted, and every gesture must justify its yield.

But I had lived under those calculations all my life - taxed, measured, priced, and discarded. I knew the hypocrisy behind their question. When the system itself manufactures poverty, appeals to charity, which then becomes a convenient mask for injustice. My act unmasked them. It revealed their discomfort with a love that spills over, with discipleship that costs everything, with faith that refuses to be practical.

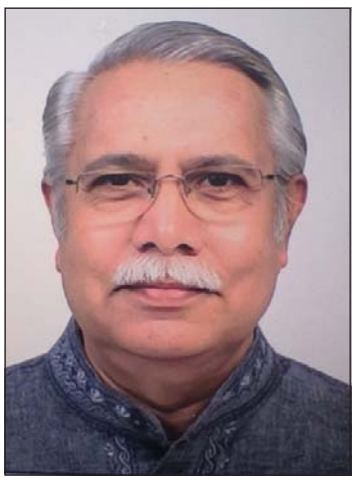
4. The Teacher's Voice: Naming the Sacred

Then He spoke. His voice steadied the room like a hand on trembling shoulders. "Leave her alone," He said. "She has done something beautiful to me."

Beautiful,*Kalón;* not strategic, not efficient, but beautiful - because it sprang from love freely given, from a heart uncolonized by fear.

He turned toward me. "She has anointed my body beforehand for burial."

The words pierced the air. No one else had dared to speak of death aloud. Yet He spoke it gently, as if my act had drawn truth to the surface. In that moment, He redefined prophecy - not as prediction, but as courageous presence. I had named what others had denied: that the powers were conspiring, that death was near, that love would not run away.



Rev. Dr. Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda was the General Secretary of the Church of South India from 2014 to 2020. He was the President of the United Theological College Society from 2015 to2018 and was the Vice President of the National Council of Churches in India from 2016 to 2023.

5. How the Margins Read the Signs

The margins always see it first! We recognize the tightening grip of empire - the surveillance, the temple's profit, the alliance between the throne and the altar. We see how religion sanctifies greed and calls it stewardship, how politics calls suppression "peace."

I had seen it in their eyes: the priests uneasy with His popularity, the governors suspicious of His talk of the kin-dom, the zealots frustrated that His revolution carried no swords. The storm was gathering. While the men debated strategy, I smelled the scent of death already on the wind. My anointing was not a waste - it was a witness and with-ness. **I was declaring that the Teacher's path of nonviolent love, of inclusive justice, was worth everything, even life itself.**

6. Transformative Justice: The Fragrance That Reverses Order

As the perfume soaked into His skin, I imagined it seeping into the world's wounds - the wounds of colonized lands, of violated bodies, of plundered earth. That scent would cling to Him when soldiers mocked Him, when nails tore flesh, when the tomb closed. The fragrance of love would mingle with the stench of death, and something divine would awaken.

Justice, He had said, is not an idea; it is embodiment.

It takes flesh, breaks open, and fills the room.

It is extravagant, like perfume poured out on the poor, the wounded, the earth itself.

He would soon overturn not just tables, but entire hierarchies - declaring that greatness is service, that leadership is humility, that power is shared. **In His kin-dom, love replaces law as the measure of holiness, and mercy is the new currency of worth.**

7. Reading the Conspiracy: Empire's Logic and Religion's Silence

After that night, I heard the whispers outside - plans whispered in corridors, priests meeting under lamplight, coins exchanged for betrayal. They said it was necessary for the nation's survival. They meant for the empire's survival. Religion and politics, hand-in-glove, plotted to eliminate a body too fragrant with freedom.

This was the economics of death: one man's life traded for the system's stability. The same economy that prices perfume and taxes the poor now set a price on the Teacher's head. The temple that once smelled of incense now reeked of blood and silver.

But we from the margins understood their logic. We had lived under it for generations. The empire must always crucify what it cannot control. It fears the unquantifiable - love, generosity, courage, and truth. My act of anointing was dangerous precisely because it could not be monetized. It belonged to the realm of grace, where the calculus of domination collapses.

8. The Pedagogy of Jesus: Equipping the Margins

In the days that followed, his teaching deepened. He gathered us - the disinherited, the fisherfolk, the widows, the tax collectors - and spoke of seeds dying to bear fruit, of servanthood as greatness, of losing life to find it. His pedagogy was participation: he trained our eyes to see what the powerful ignored. He entrusted the movement not to the educated elite, but to those who had been silenced. He was equipping the margins to lead. **He was forming a community that could outlive the cross. He was teaching us that liberation begins, not in palaces, but in houses like this one, where a woman's courage redefines worship.**

9. The Fragrance That Endures

When the soldiers came, I could still smell the perfume on His robe. It followed Him through betrayal, through the trial, through the hill. Even the cross could not erase it. The scent clung to the air like memory, like promise. And when we went to the tomb at dawn, the aroma of spices we carried mingled with the lingering trace of what I had poured days earlier - a seamless witness of love's persistence.

He had said, "Wherever the gospel is preached, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Now I understand why. My act was not an exception - it was the gospel itself in miniature: costly love breaking open in a world of calculation.

10. The Call: Be the Fragrance

And so I tell you now: Break your jars. Let the fragrance of justice fill your streets, your churches, your parliaments, your hearts. Pour out your resources where empire hoards them. Defend the beautiful, the tender, the wasteful acts of love that terrify systems built on scarcity.

This story is not nostalgia; it is instruction.

The Teacher still sits among the exploited.

The perfume still waits to be broken.

The world still reeks of betrayal - but it can yet smell of resurrection.

Remember: Beauty is never wasteful; Love is never impractical; And nothing poured out for justice ever disappears.

The scent remains.

It lingers still.

It is on us now.

Prayer

Gracious Giver of the Broken Jar, teach us to pour out our lives as freely, wasting nothing, yet holding nothing back.

Let the fragrance of our love disrupt the economies of greed and silence the councils of power that trade in human dignity.

Break open our fear of scarcity, O Christ, until generosity becomes our language and compassion our currency.

May every act of courage release the scent of your Kin-dom - where justice breathes, the earth heals, and the forgotten rise in song.

And when the world calls our offering waste, whisper again:
"This is beautiful." ●

Young People's Column

Stop Performing, Start Participating: Transmuting Performative to Embodied Ecumenism

John Paul Devakumar

The High Priestly prayer of Jesus, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), was uttered on the threshold of Gethsemane. It is a unity forged in the shadow of the Cross — grounded in truth, sacrificial love, and the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Christ.

Across the Indian subcontinent, the wider Asian landscape, and the global diaspora, Christian youth are increasingly vocal regarding the imperatives of unity, peace, and justice. Social media feeds are replete with the aesthetics of ecumenism: curated hashtags of inter- church pacts, interfaith captions, and digital declarations of harmony. But beneath this bright digital surface, a hard question remains: is our ecumenism just a performance? We risk creating a version of unity that looks great in a reel but feels hollow in real life — a unity divorced from the actual struggles of the people it claims to represent.

We live in 'Post-Normal Times' — an epoch characterised by chaotic change, overlapping crises, and the erosion of traditional certainties. In such a climate, simplistic gestures of unity often serve to mask, rather than heal, deeper fractures. Youth ecumenical encounters frequently devolve into 'events' for digital consumption rather than sacred spaces where theological conviction, courageous truth-telling, and mutual transformation are laboured over.

Performative Ecumenism and its Ontological Limits

Performative ecumenism occurs when the *image* of unity is prioritised over its *substance*. It flourishes in environments where the primary objective is a polished public profile or a well-received communal statement, rather than a costly engagement with the historical, doctrinal, and social divisions that continue to fragment the Body of Christ. Christian unity, as Scripture reminds us, is not a public relations exercise. The High Priestly prayer of Jesus, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), was uttered on the threshold of Gethsemane. It is a unity forged in the shadow of the Cross — grounded in truth, sacrificial love, and the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Christ.

The late Pope Benedict XVI provided a vital critique of a 'facile' ecumenism. He contended that unity requires far more than 'good sentiments'; it necessitates "concrete gestures that enter hearts and stir consciences" (Benedict XVI, 2005). His insistence that dialogue must be rooted in the integrity of one's own conviction resonates powerfully today. **Pope Francis complements this with a missional urgency: *"Ecumenism is a journey… not 'my Jesus against your Jesus', but our Jesus. It consists of prayer and of work for those who suffer injustice"* (Francis, 2020). Together, these pontificates remind us that authentic unity is an inseparable weave of the theological and the practical.**

A Theological Bulwark Against Extremes

This theological depth serves as a necessary guard against two contemporary distortions. On one flank, we face an identitarian retreat into "silos" — pulling back into narrow denominational or ethnic corners that cut us off from the rest of God's creation. **On the other side,** we risk a shallow and relativistic, "thin" ecumenism that simply mimics social trends, erasing our unique theological convictions in a vague pursuit of being inclusive. Neither of these paths serves the Gospel; both fail

Mr. John Paul Devakumar is a member of the Madras Diocese of the Church of South India (CSI). He is now serving as the Programme Co-ordinator of the 'Mission in Unity' at the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) headquarters, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

to reflect the radical, truth-filled unity Christ calls us to. The Biblical prophets were scathing regarding religious pageantry devoid of justice (Isaiah 1:11–17), and the Apostolic Church embodied unity through a shared life of radical vulnerability and mutual economic care (Acts 2:42–47).

Indian theologians have long pioneered this 'middle way.' The 'Madras Rethinking Group,' including Pandipeddi Chenchiah and Vengal Chakkarai, argued that the Indian Church must be 'creative and indigenous' rather than a mere repository for imported European forms of Christian theology. M.M. Thomas further insisted that theology must wrestle with the 'living forces' of socio-political reality. **Authentic ecumenism in India, therefore, must be sacramentally rooted yet socially attentive — addressing the fractures of caste, ethnicity, and nationalism without lapsing into either theological relativism or sectarian isolation.**

Reality, Responsibility, and the Asian Youth

In Asia, young Christians are shaped by 'polycrises' that defy superficial narratives. Rising authoritarianism, the persistence of caste, and the volatility of religious fundamentalism are not abstract concepts; they are the crucible in which faith is tested. In India, a performative ecumenism risks becoming a complacent act — ignoring the harrowing struggles of brothers and sisters in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, or Manipur, where the cost of discipleship is paid in displacement and exclusion.

In Post-Normal Times, young people are besieged by competing claims: nationalist rhetorics that equate faith with cultural hegemony, and economic anxieties that breed alienation. In such a milieu, performative ecumenism can feel like a 'safe' refuge—a space where one can look united without the discomfort of being held accountable. Yet the Gospel summons us precisely into that discomfort. True unity is 'costly' because it compels us to stand at the margins and confess the complicity of our own institutions.

Towards an Embodied Ecumenism

What, then, is the shape of a refreshed ecumenical imagination?

Grounded Accompaniment: We must move from 'meeting' to 'moving with.' Witness begins with *'with-ness'* — accompanying those facing systemic discrimination.

Theological Integrity: We must move beyond slogans to a deep meditation on Scripture to reflect on the riches and complexities of our faith, and allow worship, prayer, and devotion to shape unity more than publicity.

Prophetic Risk: Be willing to lose comfort or consensus for the sake of truth, to speak clearly where silence harms, and to accompany others even when it costs reputation or resources.

Embodied ecumenism in India will be evidenced when Dalit and non-Dalit Christians share the Eucharistic table without the invisible barriers of prejudice. It will be seen when congregations from the North-East and the mainland listen to one another's histories of pain with genuine solidarity. It requires the Church to resist the allure of majoritarian nationalism, witnessing instead to a citizenship shaped by the Cross. **In Post-Normal Times, where identity is weaponised and faith is politicised, the Church is called to offer a different grammar of belonging — one rooted in *Imago Dei*, not in ancestry.**

The future of ecumenism will not be secured by trending slogans or curated panels. It will be forged in small fellowships, shared meals, and the 'polylogue' of common struggles. The question remains: will we remain mere performers of unity, or will we become participants in God's reconciling mission? The Gospel does not invite us to stage harmony; it commands us to embody communion. ●

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A Report on Studies at Bossey Ecumenical Institute: 'At the Laboratory of Ecumenism'

>>> Contd. from Page 8 Col. 4

with the World Council of Churches. Courses on Ecumenical Theology, Ecumenical Missiology, Intercultural Biblical Studies, and Ecumenical Social Ethics enabled students to examine their own traditions more deeply while understanding both commonalities and differences with other Christian traditions. Engagement with the history of church divisions and the ecumenical movement focused on key moments of division, ecumenical landmarks, and the continuing relevance of the journey toward unity.

Exposure Programmes

A key component of the programme was the exposure initiatives that extended learning beyond the campus. Several field visits were organised. Through visits to the WCC Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, interactions with staff members, and participation in presentations on various WCC initiatives, students gained a clearer understanding of the Council's role in fostering ecumenical dialogue and cooperation among churches worldwide. This exposure helped to connect classroom learning with the practical work of ecumenism at the international level.

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2026, students were invited by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church to spend a week in Rome, meeting church leaders and visiting various dicasteries in order to better understand the life and ministry of the Catholic Church. The visit also included an audience with Pope Leo XIV. **These ecclesial visits provided firsthand experience of the diversity of Christian traditions.**

As the semester concluded, there emerged a deeper realization of the consequences of Christian disunity, and a clarion call for the journey toward unity. One key reflection from the months spent together was that, in a world deeply divided by conflict, inequality, and competing interests, the Church must consider what kind of witness it offers when it cannot overcome its own divisions. **The programme addressed the lived reality of Christian divisions and the responsibility of churches to pursue unity. It encouraged the students to see the ecumenical journey toward unity as a central priority and to foster similar spaces at the grassroot level, spaces where local churches and their communities can encounter one another, listen to each other's stories, pray together, and recognise that divisions are not merely theological positions but lived wounds in the Body of Christ.** ●

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Mammen Varkey

The greatest commandment – 3

Jesus uses the opportunity to redefine religion

"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." ……And after that no one dared to ask him any question." Mark 12: 28-34 (RSV)

The scribes were a class of professional exponents and teachers of the Law, a set of 'doctors of the Law', in the post exilic Judaism. So it was one who himself was an acknowledged expert on the Law, who wanted an answer to the question, "Which commandment is the first of all?" At least Mark suggests that the scribe was a genuine, sincere inquirer. It must not, then, go unnoticed that it was an instance in which an expert, an authority on the Law, approached a subverter of the Law seeking prioritization or rather re-prioritization of the Law. When we look at the incident from this perspective, it becomes a case of immense importance.

Not just re-ordering or re-prioritization

On his part, Jesus, a subverter of the Law, did not evade the question. He did dare to re-order, re-prioritize the Law. No wonder; he had been doing it all the time! **In fact, what he did, in answer to the scribe's question, was not merely re-ordering or re-prioritizating the Law but he was re-defining the essence of religion. Why?**

Not the first and the second!

It must here be pointed out that the scribe was not asking Jesus to pick out the first and the second most important commandments but he was searching for the commandment that would encapsulate and would stand for all the laws. Jesus did want the two commandments to be taken together. As one integral whole. In some manuscripts the two are connected by the word 'like'.

The subsequent generations were afraid

The implications of considering the two as one are so great, that the subsequent generations must have been afraid to consider them as one single, indivisible whole. So they must have put them or interpreted as the first and the second commandments. **It was a clear case of refusal to face all the implications or consequences of having such a law.**

Profound explication of his mission

Jesus' words should not be taken as a few words spoken in his attempt to merely answer satisfactorily the scribe's question. **Jesus was, very thoughtfully, using each of those questions, each of those incidents for lifting the thoughts and the faith of his listeners and also for a profound explication of his mission to them.**

Not only detractors but disciples as well

For him, the listeners were not just his opponents or detractors, but also ordinary people who were listening to him diligently and the twelve specially chosen disciples, whose faith and life he was determined to transform. **In that sense, this was a great opportunity for Jesus to raise a fundamental question regarding religion.**

What was the essential function of the laws? What were the objectives behind the institution of the laws? The key-objective of the laws was to order the life of individuals and the community in obedience to the will of God. Jesus did not reply to the question in an academic way. Instead he used it as a great opportunity for drawing their attention to the will of God. ●

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

Let Us Know Ourselves

A. V. Itty

Ps. 8:1-9

"Yet you made him inferior only to yourself; you crowned him with glory and honour" (v.5).

Do you know how you have become yourself? Do I know how I have become myself?: These are significant questions. We might think that we were born accidently. But the word of God tells us that even before being born or even being formed in our mothers' wombs, God had known us. David sings: "I praise you because you are to be feared; all you do is strange and wonderful. I know it with my heart" (Ps. 139:14). He further sings: "When my bones were being formed, carefully put in my mother's womb, when I was growing in secret, you knew that I was there — You saw me before I was born" (Ps.139:15).

It is said that the eyes of a human being can distinguish more than 15000 shades of colours. The scientists tell us that a computer which is equal to the brain of a human being has not yet been invented. Three lakh crores neurons function within our brains! These functions are controlled not by us, but by God. The Bible says that God created human beings in His own image (Gen 1: 27).

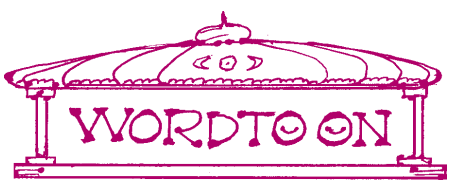
If we see God's image in us, we will consider ourselves as very valuable. God's nature will begin to reflect in our lives and actions.

We must know our strengths and weakneses; our abilities and disabilities. We must know the potentials that God has given us. We should assimilate moral values in our lives. Lofty ideals must be followed in our lives. We will have to submit ourselves completely to the Spirit of God.

Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)

Then we will be able to grow to the perfection of God's image.

May God help us for that. ●



The STUDENT is one who STUDIES till the very END without any DENT

Food For Thought:

If human beings find out themselves, all their problems shall be solved!

Kerala Council of Churches

Justice J. B. Koshy Commission Report Must Be Released

The Kerala Council of Churches (KCC), the official ecumenical forum representing churches in Kerala, has demanded the immediate release of the Justice J. B. Koshy Commission report, stating that the failure to make the report public even after one thousand days since its submission, is a serious lapse. The Council urged that due justice be ensured to the Christian community, including the rights of Dalit Christians.

The Justice J. B. Koshy Commission is a commission appointed by the State Government to study the backward conditions of Christians in Kerala and to submit a report.

KCC Protest Rally at Thiruvananthapuram on 17th February 2026

KCC further stated that enacting laws in the name of religion in a secular nation like India and denying benefits to Dalit Christians amounts to a violation of the Constitution. As part of safeguarding the secular principles guaranteed by the Constitution of India, the Council demanded that all benefits granted to Scheduled Caste communities be extended to Dalit Christians as well.

Raising these demands, on 17th February, a Christian Maha Rally led by the Kerala Council of Churches began from the LMS Compound in Thiruvananthapuram and concluded with a public meeting in front of the Secretariat. The meeting was inaugurated by Bishop Jose George of the CSI Kollam–Kottarakkara Diocese. KCC General Secretary Dr. Prakash P. Thomas presided over the function.

Among those who addressed the gathering were KCC Vice President Shibi Peter; KPCC Political Affairs Committee member Bindu Krishna; Salvation Army Personnel Secretary Lt. Colonel Justin Raj; Lt. Colonel Saju Daniel; NCCI Dalit Desk Secretary Rev. Charles Sundar Raj; Rev. Dr. Crystal Jayaraj; KCC District President Rev. A. R. Noble; Secretary Rev. Dr. L. T. Pavithra Singh; Rev. Sanal Raj; Shajimon S. Kaithakkuzhi; Major T. E. Stephenson; Very Rev. Fr. Abraham Kanjikkal Corepiscopa; and Ashwin Hamlet.

– KCC News

Christian Conference of Asia

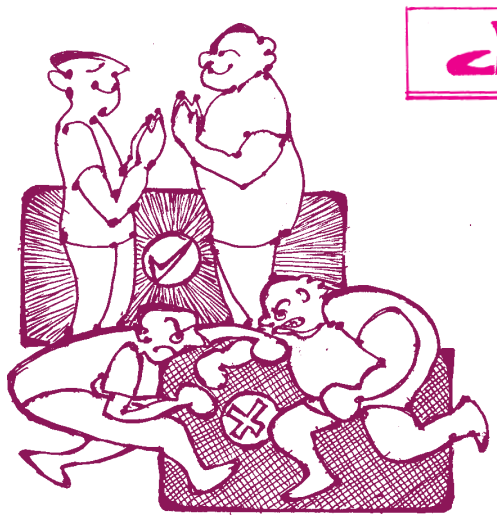
CCA — an organ and fellowship of churches and ecumenical councils in asia for initiating and facilitating dynamic christian witness and action

International Consultation on Emerging Ecclesial Landscapes and Ecumenical Paradigms in Asia

An international consultation on "Ecumenism in Asia: Emerging Ecclesial Landscapes and Ecumenical Paradigms" is scheduled to take place in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 31 May to 3 June 2026. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) will bring together fifty church and ecumenical leaders for this consultation, which will serve as a prelude to the platinum jubilee of CCA in 2027.

According to the CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, the consultation comes at a critical time as churches in Asia undergo significant changes. Amidst profound transformations shaping churches across the region, and against the backdrop of a rapidly changing ecclesial and ecumenical landscape, CCA will initiate discussions on a number of issues and concerns pertinent to the life and witness of Asian churches. **"As increasing ecclesial diversity, the emergence of new forms of Christian identity, and changing patterns of mission and evangelisation reshape the Christian presence across the continent, there is an urgent need for visible unity among churches of different traditions and confessional identities. These developments pose serious challenges to the mission and witness of the churches and call for a renewed ecumenical commitment grounded in justice, peace, reconciliation, and solidarity", said the CCA General Secretary.**

– CCA News



cheerchat

To respond is Positive; To react is Negative

– Zig Zigfar

A Report on Studies at Bossey Ecumenical Institute

At the Laboratory of Ecumenism

Abel Punnoose

The Bossey Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, located near Geneva, brings together students from different Christian traditions around the world for ecumenical formation and theological study. During the past academic year, the Institute hosted students from Africa, Asia, and Europe representing Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. The complementary certificate course was a semester-long programme (mid-September to the end of January) offered under the University of Geneva. The Institute provided a space for theological reflections, intercultural encounters, and ecclesial dialogues.

Bossey Ecumenical Institute. Sept. 2025 to Jan. 2026 Training Programme on Ecumenism - Resource Persons and Participants

The Life of Bossey

One of the distinctive features of studying at Bossey was the experience of living together within a diverse community. The programme required students to live in community, sharing daily routines alongside academic engagement. Conversations in classrooms, during meals, and in informal gatherings offered opportunities for profound learning and reflection. These interactions enabled students to encounter Christianity as a global reality expressed through different liturgical traditions, theological emphases, and cultural contexts. Reflecting the state of the Christian world today, this diversity also introduced challenges, with various issues and tensions emerging from time to time, that required being addressed in unity, as Christ has called His Church to do.

Another dimension of life at Bossey was its shared liturgical life. Morning prayer and regular gatherings in the chapel played an integral role in understanding prayer and worship within the global Christian fellowship. These moments provided firsthand experience of the worship patterns and cultural expressions integral to each church tradition. **These gatherings became exercises in mutual respect and appreciation, even in the presence of theological and liturgical differences unfamiliar to one another. Students gathered in genuine fellowship, appreciating the uniqueness and gifts each tradition brought before God in prayer and worship.**

Academic Formation

The academic programmes at Bossey followed an integrative approach that brought together central Christian themes and explored how various traditions engaged with them. This resulted in a deeper exploration of culture, tradition, and faith. The courses included: Workshop on Intercultural Biblical Studies, taught by Rev. Dr. Lawrence Iwanmundi; Ecumenical Theology, taught by Dr. Ani Ghazaryan; Ecumenical Missiology, taught by Rev. Dr. Benjamin Simon; Ecumenical Social Ethics, taught by Rev. Dr. Kuzipa Nalwamba, and the History of the Ecumenical Movement, taught by various professors who are associated

Contd. Page 6 Col. 1 ..>>>

Dn. Abel Punnoose serves as an ordained deacon of the Believers Eastern Church."He earned his Master of Theology from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston and later completed a certificate program at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Geneva last year.

People's Reporter
A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

Printed and Published by
Vattukalathil Chako John
No. 29, 30, Oasis Industrial Estate, Nehru Road,
Vakola Masjid, Santacruz East
Mumbai - 400 055
for and on behalf of
New Education and Welfare Service Trust
and
Printed at, and Posted from
Anita Art Printers,
No. 29, 30, Oasis Industrial Estate, Nehru Road,
Vakola Masjid, Santacruz East
Mumbai - 400 055
Ph: 022 - 26652978
and
Published at
No. 29, 30, Oasis Industrial Estate, Nehru Road,
Vakola Masjid, Santacruz East
Mumbai - 400 055
Editor
Valiyapurayidam Mammen Varkki
Valiyapurayidam,
East Fort,
Mavelikara - 690 101
Kerala

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the editors.